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SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER CALLS FOR "RESTRUCTURING" OF  
INFORMATION MINISTRY

Reftel: Kuwait 1493

1. SUMMARY: Dr. Anas Al-Reshaid, Kuwait's information minister, said his ministry requires "restructuring" in a July 1 interview on the sidelines of Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's recent visit to Washington, DC. While the term "restructuring" does not itself suggest radical change, Al-Reshaid also said that Kuwaitis do not need an information ministry, and said that he had formed a committee to study the "restructuring." Al-Reshaid also used the interview to reiterate his dedication to a free media, and his determination to navigate through parliament a new, media-friendly draft press and publications law. END SUMMARY.

2. The July 1 interview with Al-Reshaid, broadcast on Al-Hurra TV, contained some of the first public statements made by the minister, who was appointed in April, detailing his specific intentions for the ministry (reftel). While Kuwaitis need access to radio and television, he said, they do not need an information ministry. He said that a state media monopoly has no place in a country governed by a constitution, and that the media market must be opened for full private sector participation.

3. Al-Reshaid said that while the state would likely maintain a role in regulating media, the way to improve media performance is through more freedom, greater democracy, and better education for journalists. He said that increased media competition, from satellite television and, increasingly, the Internet, also meant that the ministry needed to embrace change. He said that he had formed a ministry committee to explore how to accomplish the restructuring.

4. Much legislation would be required to carry out his vision, the minister said, but stressed that his top priority now is the passage of a draft press and publications law. (Note: The Cabinet approved the ministry's latest version of the draft law on June 4. Parliament has adjourned for the summer, and will not consider the law before the next session opens, in October. End note.) Al-Reshaid said that the press, several members of parliament, and several national political blocs have approved his draft. The law, which underwent several drafts in the last session, will determine regulations for media ownership, outline rules under which media outlets can be shut down, and delineate taboo topics, such as reportage about Islam and the ruling family, and the penalties for breaking these taboos.

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